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Summary record of the 8th meeting
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Chairman: Mr. Abelian ..... (Armenia)
Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions: Mr. Mselle

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The meeting was called to order at 3 p.m.

Agenda item 125: Financing of the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (A/52/730/Add.2 and Add.3 and Add.3/Corr.2; A/53/474)

Agenda item 136: Financing of the United Nations Mission of Observers in Tajikistan (A/52/772/Add.2; A/53/474)

Agenda item 140: Financing of the United Nations Preventive Deployment Force (A/53/437 and A/53/481)

1. **Mr. Halbwachs** (Controller) said that the proposed budget for the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) for the period from 1 July 1998 to 30 June 1999 was $65 million gross. It provided for the maintenance of the Mission at the authorized strength of 203 military observers, 186 contingent personnel, 7 force orderly personnel and 81 civilian police observers, supported by a civilian establishment of 285 international staff. The proposed budget was based on the maintenance of the resources in the Mission area for the period ending 30 June 1998, with the exception of two demining platoons which were to have been repatriated by that date. Those platoons were now expected to leave the Mission in October 1998.

2. A change in the contract for the lease of three helicopters since the submission of the original budget proposals had resulted in an additional requirement of $1.6 million. As indicated in the exchange of letters with the Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (ACABQ) reproduced in annexes I and II to the related report of ACABQ (A/53/474), it was the Secretary-General's view that the additional cost could be met from within existing estimates.

3. Taking into account that the General Assembly had already approved an appropriation and assessment for the period from 1 July to 31 October 1998, a further appropriation and assessment of $42.3 million gross for the period from 1 November 1998 to 30 June 1999 ought to be sufficient. The Advisory Committee recommended an appropriation and assessment of $37.25 million gross.

4. The proposed budget for the United Nations Mission of Observers in Tajikistan (UNMOT) for the period from 1 July 1998 to 30 June 1999, which amounted to $22,282,100 gross, provided for the maintenance of UNMOT at its authorized strength of 120 miliary observers, 2 civilian police, 68 international staff and 143 locally recruited staff. It reflected an increase of $5.7 million gross over the previous budget, pursuant to the expansion and extension of the mission's mandate by the Security Council.

5. Following the murder in July 1998 of four members of UNMOT, the Secretary-General had requested an amount of $4.1 million for armoured vehicles and improved communications equipment. Taking into account appropriations and assessments already approved, a further appropriation and assessment of $14.1 million gross for the period from 1 November 1998 to 30 June 1999 ought to be sufficient. The Advisory Committee's recommendation was for an amount of $11.9 million gross.

6. Introducing the Secretary-General's report on the financing of the United Nations Preventive Deployment Force (UNPREDEP) (A/53/437), he said that the General Assembly had appropriated an amount of $21 million gross for the maintenance of UNPREDEP at a military strength of 750 troops for the period from 1 July to 31 August 1998 and the liquidation of UNPREDEP thereafter, in accordance with Security Council resolution 1142 (1997). The Council had subsequently extended the mandate of the Force until 28 February 1999, and had authorized an increase in troop strength to 1,050. The Secretary-General was recommending an appropriation of $34.4 million to cover the additional requirements for the maintenance of UNPREDEP for the period from 1 July 1998 to 30 June 1999.

7. **Mr. Zahid** (Morocco) said that the letter from the Controller to the Chairman of the Advisory Committee reproduced in annex I to document A/53/474 indicated that failure to conclude the status-of-forces agreements was impeding progress towards the holding of a referendum in Western Sahara. Yet the report of the Secretary-General (S/1998/849) to which that comment made reference stated, rather, that a number of problems continued to impede progress towards the holding of a referendum, and that signature of the status-of-forces agreements was long overdue. The Secretary-General had thus never stated that the delay in concluding the status-of-forces agreements was impeding progress towards the holding of a referendum.

8. It should be appreciated that the Governments of Algeria and Mauritania, in addition to his own Government, would need to sign the agreements. His Government, for its part, had already submitted proposed amendments. MINURSO had, in fact, been present in Morocco since late 1991, its presence there being governed by an exchange of letters between his Government and the Secretary-General constituting a legal instrument according appropriate privileges and immunities. That instrument had allowed MINURSO to discharge its mandate without any difficulty up to the present time.

9. A further difficulty in the Controller's letter lay in the reference to the completion of the identification process. The Secretary-General's report had actually stated that the identification of over 147,000 applicants had been completed, which did not mean that the identification process as such had been completed. Moreover, any difficulties in identifying applicants from the three groupings referred to by the Secretary-General were not attributable to his Government. The Controller's letter also referred to "contested tribal groupings", a phrase which did not appear in the Secretary-General's report and which, as far as the United Nations and his own Government were concerned, was simply not relevant, since those candidates, in common with all others, had been duly registered. Only one of the parties involved sought to contest its status.

10. Those comments applied also to the Advisory Committee's reply to the Controller, reproduced in annex II to document A/53/474.

11. Lastly, in paragraph 1 of the French text of the Advisory Committee's report, MINURSO was referred to as a "Mission d'observation" (observer mission), whereas it was a Mission for the holding of a referendum in the southern provinces of Morocco, also referred to as Western Sahara.

12. He trusted that the three minor inaccuracies he had mentioned, which were no doubt inadvertent, would be corrected.

13. **Mr. Halbwachs** (Controller) said there had been no intent on the part of the Secretariat to misrepresent what the Secretary-General had said or what the actual situation was. He had simply attempted to write a letter to the Chairman of the Advisory Committee summarizing the situation in a few paragraphs. He had not expected that letter to become an official document of the General Assembly, otherwise the Security Council report would have been quoted verbatim. He trusted that the delegation of Morocco would see the matter in that spirit.

Agenda item 114: Programme planning (*continued*) A/53/6 (Prog. 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 13/Rev.1, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 20, 23 and Corr.1, 24 and Corr.1, 26, 27 and 28), A/53/16, A/53/90, A/53/122 and Add.1, A/53/133 and A/53/134)

Proposed revisions to the medium-term plan for the period 1998–2001 (*continued*)

14. **Ms. Aragon** (Philippines), speaking on behalf of the States members of the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN), said that she welcomed the new format for reporting the discussions of the Committee for Programme and Coordination (CPC). ASEAN attached great importance to the role of CPC in the planning, programming and budgeting process, as outlined in General Assembly resolution 41/213. It associated itself with the statement made by the representative of Indonesia on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

15. With respect to the Secretary-General's proposed revisions to the medium-term plan for the period 1998–2001 relating to programme 15: Economic and social development in Asia and the Pacific (A/53/6 (Prog. 15)), she reaffirmed her support for the multifaceted role of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) as a regional forum for the exchange of views and experience and as a catalyst for regional cooperation for development. The proposed revisions to programme 15 were in conformity with the conference structure mandated by ESCAP. She hoped that the Commission's decision to reduce the number of its subprogrammes from 10 to 7 would improve the efficiency of its secretariat. However, she was concerned to note, from the Secretary-General's programme performance report (A/53/122/Add.1, para. 16.9), that a high vacancy rate and resource constraints had adversely affected the full implementation of priority areas of the Commission's work programme in 1996–1997.

16. ASEAN welcomed the mainstreaming of the gender perspective into all relevant areas of the Commission's work. It was pleased that the proposed revisions had taken into account recent developments such as the current economic crisis. The Commission's subprogramme on development research and policy analysis was very important in that it would provide a broad view of regional economic and social trends and a basis for setting longer-term policy goals for the region. She welcomed the priority to be given to the short- and long-term impact of the current crisis on the countries affected and on the region as a whole, and looked forward to the completion of the analysis and recommendations mentioned in paragraph 15.9 (f) of document A/53/6 (Prog. 15).

17. ASEAN endorsed the recommendation of CPC on programme 15, as contained in paragraph 94 of its report (A/53/16). It agreed with CPC that the Organization's priorities should continue to be established in the medium-term plan, which was the principal policy directive of the United Nations (A/53/16, para. 48).

18. **Mr. Lozinsky** (Russian Federation) welcomed the new format of the medium-term plan which established a clearer relationship between planning and budgeting and between the programmes and organizational structures of the Secretariat and should thus ensure greater accountability and enhance responsibility for programme delivery. At the same time, the medium-term plan should be a flexible management tool and must not be a means of retaining outdated mandates and programmes.

19. During the current year, the General Assembly would be called upon to adopt the proposed revisions to the medium-term plan for the period 1998–2001. His delegation was pleased to note that CPC had reached a consensus at its thirty-eighth session on all the proposed revisions, and it was prepared to support its recommendations.

20. Referring to the Secretary-General's report on the programme performance of the United Nations for the biennium 1996–1997 (A/53/122 and Add.1), he said that his delegation agreed with the conclusions of CPC, as contained in paragraphs 33 and 34 of its report (A/33/16), in particular concerning the need for greater emphasis on qualitative analysis and the evaluation of programme performance.

21. He noted with regret that, once again, the Secretary-General's report was mainly descriptive in nature and contained too little analytical information on the Organization's programmes to enable specific conclusions to be drawn and recommendations made on ways of enhancing the effectiveness of its work during subsequent planning and budgeting cycles. His delegation was firmly convinced that evaluation was an essential means of ensuring the relevance, effectiveness and impact of the Organization's activities and agreed with CPC that further improvement was required with respect to evaluation.

22. In conclusion, his delegation supported the recommendations of CPC on the proposed revisions to the Regulations and Rules Governing Programme Planning, the Programming Aspects of the Budget, the Monitoring of Implementation and the Methods of Evaluation.

23. **Mr. Darwish** (Egypt) said that his delegation supported the statement made by the representative of Indonesia on behalf of the Group of 77 and China and affirmed the importance of the medium-term plan, which embodied the legislative mandates in specific programmes and activities and reflected the priorities of the Member States.

24. In the view of his delegation, the priorities identified in the medium-term plan should be taken as an overall framework that would be spelled out in more specific terms in the budget outline where they would be related directly to resources and budget appropriations, subject to there being no conflict or discrepancy that might give rise to confusion in the establishment of the programme budgets. In that connection, his delegation stressed the importance of spelling out legislative mandates very clearly so as to avoid any ambiguity or subjective interpretation in their implementation.

25. He referred to the late submission of the report on the programme performance of the United Nations for the biennium 1996–1997 (A/53/122 and Add.1), saying that his delegation shared the concerns expressed by CPC in paragraph 19 of its report (A/53/16). He emphasized that the Secretariat must comply with the six-week rule for the submission of reports.

26. His delegation commended the Secretariat on the high rate of implementation, especially in the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the Department of Public Information, and hoped that a similar increase in implementation rates would be achieved by the International Trade Centre and the Economic Commission for Africa where the rates were alarmingly low. His delegation had taken note of the explanation of those low rates given in the report of the Secretary-General (A/53/122, para. 11); there was a need to increase the extrabudgetary resources for the International Trade Centre in order to enable it to carry out its mandate and activities more fully.

27. He commended the important role played by the United Nations Development Programme and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, and also the activities with respect to human settlements, crime, drugs and refugees, and emphasized the necessity of making resources available to the Department of Public Information so that the message could be disseminated to all and not be directed to one specific group. It was important to retain traditional means of communication while at the same time making use of advanced technologies.

28. His delegation appreciated the efforts made by the Office of Internal Oversight Services to uncovering irregularities and improve the financial and administrative functioning of the Organization. referring to paragraph 29.1 of document A/53/122/Add.1, he enquired whether the vacant posts in the Central Monitoring and Inspection Unit and the Investigations Unit were still vacant and asked about the impact of the frozen posts, if any, on the activities of the Office.

29. **Mr. Herrera** (Mexico) said that CPC played a key role in setting priorities and supervising the coordination of the activities carried out by various components of the

Organization. At its most recent session, CPC had successfully formulated conclusions and recommendations on all the issues before it. That exceptional exercise must be complemented by decisive action on the Secretariat's part to improve the quality of its reports so as to enable Member States to take substantive decisions. The CPC report itself contained a number of indications on the manner in which information should be presented to the Member States, particularly with regard to programme implementation. His delegation supported the conclusions and recommendations contained in the report of CPC, which would facilitate the work of the Fifth Committee.

30. **Mr. Hae-Yun Park** (Republic of Korea) said that he welcomed the improved working methods of CPC and the spirit of collaboration that had prevailed at its most recent session, which had reflected a genuine commitment to strengthening the role of CPC. His delegation had often stressed the importance of planning, programming and evaluation and of the medium-term plan as the principal policy directive of the United Nations. The new format of the medium-term plan had resulted in better identification of the Organization's objectives and greater accountability in the Secretariat. He supported the recommendations and conclusions of CPC, as contained in document A/53/16.

31. **Mr. Asadi** (Islamic Republic of Iran), Chairman of the Committee for Programme and Coordination, said he was pleased that the report of CPC had been received favourably by the Fifth Committee. The thirty-eighth session of CPC had been free from unnecessary confrontational polemic and had been marked by a clear political will, on the part of all participants, to tackle contentious issues and to engage in a genuine give and take. That improvement was attributable to the improved working methods of CPC. The next step was to ensure that the report of CPC received due attention from the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly, through the Fifth Committee, and that the recommendations and conclusions formulated on all items were duly followed up.

Agenda item 112: Review of the efficiency of the administrative and financial functioning of the United Nations (*continued*)

Agenda item 119: Human resources management (*continued*)

Draft resolution A/C.5/53/L.8: Gratis personnel provided by Governments and other entities

32. **Mrs. Brennen-Haylock** (Bahamas), Vice-Chairman, introducing draft resolution A/C.5/53/L.8, which had been submitted following informal consultations, said that it reaffirmed and strengthened the substance of previous resolutions on gratis personnel. It sent a clear message that Member States were fully committed to the 28 February 1999 deadline for the phase-out of gratis personnel. Paragraph 8, which had been supported by all delegations in the informal consultations, introduced a new element by requesting the Secretary-General to ensure that recruitment for any new posts arising from the phase-out of gratis personnel was made on as wide a geographical basis as possible with due regard to gender. The beginning of paragraph 6 should be revised to read, "Takes note of the commitment and the assurances by the Secretary-General that the recruitment process for the replacement of type II gratis personnel, including those in the two international tribunals, will be completed by 28 February 1999".

33. **Mr. Wortel** (Director, Operational Services Division) said that, at the 5th meeting of the Committee, he had informed Member States that the deadline for the submission of applications for posts requiring active military and civilian police service had been extended to 27 October 1998. At the same time, notes verbales had been distributed to all Member States to inform them of the extension of the deadline. During informal consultations regarding the support account and gratis personnel, four Member States had reported that they had not received the note verbale which had been circulated to all Member States on 7 October 1998. Under the circumstances, he wished to confirm that the Secretariat would make all possible efforts to ensure that the candidates nominated by those Member States which reportedly had not received the note verbale on time were accorded equitable consideration for the posts concerned. Those exceptional arrangements would not in any way affect the mandated deadline of 28 February 1999 for the phasing out of type II gratis personnel and the completion of the related recruitment exercise.

34. *Draft resolution A/C.5/53/L.8 was adopted.*

The meeting rose at 4.05 p.m.